

THE EUGENICS REVIEW

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"Eugenics is the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations either physically or mentally."

NOTES OF THE QUARTER

THE Joint Committee on Voluntary Sterilization* has now been at work for just over six months. In that period it has supplied, in face of considerable difficulties, an increasing demand for speakers on the report and recommendations of the Brock Committee. It has prepared a valuable Handbook for Speakers to which further reference will be made later in these notes. By taking a prominent part in large meetings on voluntary sterilization, and particularly by its enterprise in sending prominent speakers to the discussion on this subject that occupied a full session at the recent Public Health Congress and Exhibition, it has obtained considerable publicity (though more in the provincial than in the London Press) for its proposals. Furthermore, it has performed a valuable work in answering systematically the misleading reports, articles and letters on sterilization that have lately been appearing in the Press in increasing numbers.

We need not be surprised and certainly not alarmed, at the volume of the misrepres-

entation to which voluntary eugenic sterilization is now being subjected; rather may the growing anxiety of the opposition be taken as a delicate index of the growing success of our own efforts. But it would be well to realize that the Joint Committee cannot itself keep pace with all the letters, all the reports, all the articles in the Press that present voluntary sterilization, and the problems it is designed to deal with, in a form that those who know the facts find it a little hard to recognize. It is therefore important that Fellows and Members of this *Society* should reinforce the efforts of the Joint Committee by sending a prompt correction to any misrepresentation on the subject they may come across in the national and provincial Press. An effective way of exposing the shifts to which the religious and other interests opposed to this policy are forced to resort is to place in juxtaposition the statement being replied to and the actual words of the Brock Report dealing with the same subject; emphasizing the fact that since the publication of this report there may have been more excuse for added anxiety on the part of those who have an unaccountable preference for the continued fertility of persons afflicted with serious hereditary diseases, but none whatever for not knowing what it is that they profess to oppose. If the Joint Committee could be relieved of even part of this work it would have all the more time for its task of preparing the expository articles it hopes to supply to leading journals in the coming year.



The most tangible achievement of the Joint Committee has been the production of a voluntary sterilization Bill, which already has been submitted to, and after slight but suitable emendation, endorsed by the County

* See also EUGENICS REVIEW, July 1934, p. 99, and October 1934, p. 178.

Councils Association, the Association of Municipal Corporations and the Mental Hospitals Association ;* and plans are now being developed to send a deputation of these bodies to the Minister of Health, with a view to pressing upon him the desirability of introducing this year a similar Bill as a Government measure.

It must be confessed that the immediate political outlook is not very promising. The hope that there might be some reference to possible legislation on the lines of the Brock Committee's recommendations in the King's speech was disappointed, and the Joint Committee must now plan its work in relation to the next General Election, which may possibly take place as early as next autumn. It aims at conducting an intensive campaign in at least half the total number of constituencies, its first task being to complete the circularization of all members of Parliament and prospective candidates by this summer, in order to leave itself free for the rest of the year to devote itself entirely to the election.



In the task of marshalling its forces for this campaign, the co-ordination of the considerable volume of preparatory work already accomplished throughout the country will play no small part. Already there exists a loose but widespread organization of groups and individuals maintaining contact with the Joint Committee. A number of important national organizations have passed resolutions in favour of voluntary eugenic sterilization, and local branches of organizations that have not yet done so are being approached in the expectation that many of them will be persuaded to press upon their central bodies the need for similar action before the summer. A number of women's sections of the Labour Party and the Co-operative Guilds are in enthusiastic support of our policy, and the resolutions to this effect that are reaching the headquarters of their organizations cannot fail to influence

the views of their executive committees. Religious bodies, too, are being canvassed, and it is believed that their support will do much to counteract the pressure that will certainly be brought to bear upon the Government, particularly upon the Ministry of Health, by the one religious body in this country that is opposed to voluntary sterilization.*

Beyond this the Joint Committee can do much to foster the interest in the subject that is now developing throughout the country by allocating small grants towards secretarial work and other inevitable expenses to local organizations that are prepared to carry on active propaganda on its behalf. But for this more funds are needed, and it is hoped that everybody who can will help the Joint Committee to raise them.



An interesting speech in opposition to eugenic sterilization was made by Mr. George Gibson, a member of the Trade Unions Congress General Council, in the discussion (referred to above) in the Public Health Congress which was held on November 23rd. The representatives of the Joint Committee, Professor Julian Huxley, Dr. C. P. Blacker and Wing-Commander James, M.P., having given lucid, though of necessity elementary, expositions of the case in favour of the proposals of the Brock Committee, Mr. Gibson—introducing, to quote his own words, “the only discordant note in a chorus of unanimous approval”—stigmatized sterilization as “a confession of defeat,” that is to say, as a measure which implied that we considered some forms of physical and mental defects to be incurable. He maintained the general principle that when proposals for legislation affecting social classes, but particularly the poorest, were under consideration there must not be “one law for the rich and another for the poor,” and more especially that public opinion must be satisfied not only that

* A preliminary draft of this Bill has been published in the *Municipal Review*, November 1934, p. 451. The revised version will appear in a forthcoming issue of this REVIEW.

* It is noteworthy, as Major A. G. Church pointed out in the discussion following Professor Muckermann's paper (see p. 267), that while the Roman Catholics of Germany appear to have swallowed a camel their co-religionists in this country are still straining at a gnat.

existing methods for dealing with the unfit were ineffective or could not be made effective, but that these "drastic" recommendations would, if sanctioned, achieve the purposes they were intended to serve.

In support of his argument Mr. Gibson made much of the Departmental Committee's statement that it is impossible "to say about any individual, without regard to the other partner, that he or she is so constituted that some of the offspring must inevitably be mentally abnormal," claiming that "from the union of two persons definitely identifiable, one or both, as abnormal, have sprung healthy and non-defective children, sometimes exceptionally endowed with gifts and graces of intellect and character." "Society," he added, "is not so richly equipped with brains of the highest quality that we can safely adopt measures which may deprive us of those who are capable, though springing from a diseased stock, of enriching society's cultural inheritance."

We have quoted these remarks in full because they are an exceptionally good statement of errors and misconceptions that are, if Mr. Gibson will forgive the remark, the stock-in-trade of opponents of voluntary sterilization. It is true that, in the present state of knowledge, it may be impossible to predict positively whether any or all the offspring of a *particular union* of mentally defective or disordered persons will themselves be mentally defective or develop a mental disorder: but such a prediction can be made, and stated in statistical terms, about the progeny of large groups of persons thus affected. It would be interesting to know if Mr. Gibson would oppose the Ministry of Transport's efforts to make the roads fit for others than heroes to drive and walk on because it is impossible to predict, about any given motorist or pedestrian, that he will be killed or injured to-morrow? If the Ministry of Transport's weekly return of road deaths and accidents provides a sufficient reason for the drastic departmental action that is now being taken (and for the still more drastic action that is under contemplation), then we need have no hesitation in asserting that the numerous carefully compiled groups of

figures bearing on the heritability of certain mental and physical disorders provide an even more conclusive reason for such action as has been proposed by the Brock Committee.

All governments in their legislation have to think in statistical terms. They cannot say that this or that man or woman will be unemployed on such or such a date: but they are bound to estimate the probable volume of total unemployment on that date in such and such industries or areas, or throughout the country. It would represent a great political advance if their predictions were as accurate as those that can now be made about the progeny of defective persons!



The fear that sterilization of mental defectives might seriously limit the supply of exceptionally endowed persons was admirably dealt with by Professor A. M. Carr-Saunders at the Voluntary Eugenic Sterilization Conference, held under the auspices of this *Society* in May 1932.

"This idea," he said, "*seemed* to be based on the notion that inheritance was subject to no law and that genius might spring up anywhere with equal probability. Sometimes it was held that there was a kind of law which associated genius with defect. It could now be said that the mechanism of inheritance was governed by law and that genius was precisely the opposite of defect. The chance of genius arising in a mentally defective strain was infinitely less than of it arising in a strain of super-normal intellectual capacity. The chance, therefore, of losing genius when defectives did not produce offspring, whether they are sterilized or from any other reason, was remote, whereas under these circumstances it was certain that much deficiency would never see the light."

It may well be asked why we should exchange the certainty of eliminating part of the hereditary diseases that now exist in the community for the, alas, very remote chance of producing an occasional highly endowed person from defective stocks. It is possible to increase the supply of gifted persons, that indeed is the purpose of positive eugenics, but we find it hard to imagine a more ineffective method to that end than the one favoured by Mr. Gibson.



The great body of trade unionists represented by Mr. Gibson may be sure that we share to the full their view that there must not be "one law for the rich and another for the poor." But that is exactly the state of affairs which exists to-day. If the Voluntary Sterilization Bill supported by this *Society* did nothing else, it would remove the reproach that our laws deny to the poor a privilege that is freely open to the well-to-do. Anybody, hereditarily diseased or not, can to-day be sterilized if he is free to pay for the operation. This freedom is denied to the poor. We cannot compete in class consciousness with the speaker who, in the discussion on Professor Muckermann's paper,* attributed to eugenics a class bias (and apparently was prepared to support sterilization in Utopia but not even as a miserable palliative to our present imperfections), but to us this denial to the hereditarily afflicted poor of a privilege that is freely available to the rich appears as an intolerable class injustice, and one which we imagined anyone adhering to the political parties of the Left would wish to see removed.



In reply to the discussion, Professor Huxley urged that the process of evolution, which had led up from the lowest forms of life to the human being, could only be continued by man deliberately and consciously taking control of his own destiny. It was only during the last twenty years that control of the size of the family had taken place, and now it was proposed that man should improve the quality of his own stock. Far from being a confession of defeat, as Mr. Gibson had called it, it seemed to him the beginning of control of destiny by man in furtherance of the great stream of evolutionary progress.

Commenting on the changing attitude of the general public to eugenic sterilization, Wing-Commander James said that it was due in part to the man in the street having realized that the operation required did not involve bodily mutilation. To-day it was no exaggeration to say that all classes, whether poor or wealthy and leisured, agreed upon the desira-

bility of introducing legislation to permit voluntary sterilization, and now the only organized body in this country opposed to voluntary sterilization was the Roman Catholic Church, and even here in discussions with prominent Catholics he had been struck by the recent modification of their views. The Government could be asked to introduce a measure, or, if unwilling, could be compelled to do so by pressure of public opinion.

There we must leave it. The discussion was reported in *The Mental Hospital Workers' Journal* of December 1934, which published a summary of the speeches made by our representatives, and by representatives of the County Councils Association and the Association of Municipal Corporations, and (small blame to it!) the full text of the speech by Mr. Gibson. It deserves to be read if for no other reason than that this speech is as effective an example of the more intelligent kind of opposition to the recommendations of the Brock Committee as we are likely to meet.



At a Members' meeting on November 20th, Dr. Stella Churchill advocated the establishment throughout the country of marriage bureaus where medical men and women, preferably specialists, would be prepared to undertake the medical examination of persons about to marry. It would be a function of these bodies to make a eugenic prognosis for those seeking their advice, basing their judgment on the family history, the applicant's own medical history, and his or her physical and mental condition at the time of the examination. Such marriage certificates are issued in various countries of Europe and in a number of States in America. The practice is not however the same in all places. In some, for instance in the Scandinavian countries, a certificate is granted simply on a statement by the man and woman that they believe themselves to be free from disease and fit to marry; in others, only on the result of detailed medical examinations by specially appointed doctors. In several European countries the exchange of health certificates before marriage is under consideration.

* See p. 267.

In the course of her remarks Dr. Churchill referred to a provisional "health schedule before marriage" that had been drawn up by a committee of this *Society* (consisting of Dr. Langdon-Down, Sir Humphry Rolleston, Dr. Stella Churchill and Dr. Maurice Shaw). The Committee hopes to complete the final draft of this document as soon as it has had an opportunity of examining the "marriage certificates" employed in other countries. Judging from the widespread notice given in the Press to Dr. Churchill's announcement of the preliminary draft, it may be expected that the publication of the completed schedule will provoke considerable public interest and discussion, and be a source of valuable publicity for the work of this *Society*.



A Committee, consisting of Professor A. M. Carr-Saunders, Professor R. A. Fisher, Professor Julian Huxley and the General Secretary, with power to co-opt at its discretion, has been appointed by the Council to report upon any aspects of positive eugenics the investigation of which this *Society* might appropriately sponsor. It has been recommended that the Committee should give special consideration to the following matters:

- (a) The Family Allowance schemes which are or have been in operation in different countries, including Great Britain.
- (b) In respect of each Family Allowance scheme, (1) the amounts of the allowances in relation to basic wages or salaries; and (2) the effect, if any, of the Family Allowances upon fertility, the national charge for destitution, and infantile mortality.
- (c) The position of England in regard to the birth-rate and probable future population by age groups; the extent to which the population as a whole is failing to replace itself and the position of different occupational grades in relation to the replacement rate.
- (d) What public or private schemes exist, other than Family Allowances as defined above, which might improve

the economic status of families with dependent children. (Here are included such social services as crèches, free dental and medical services for elementary schoolchildren, income-tax rebates, scholarships for secondary schools and universities, allowances for children under war and civil widows' pensions schemes, unemployment benefits and public assistance rent rebates.)



The investigation of these matters would be important at any time: but it has a special urgency to-day. In a very short time from now we may anticipate an intensive and largely panicky propaganda for something, never mind exactly what, but "something," to be done about the decline in the total volume and net reproduction rate of our population. It is highly probable that there will be fairly general, though certainly far from unanimous, agreement with the view expressed by Professor J. B. S. Haldane in his recent lecture on "Human Biology and Politics,"* that "a great diminution of our population, while that of other countries is increasing, would intensify the present instability of the international equilibrium. . . . Even if a slight diminution in our population is desirable, the catastrophic fall which will occur if the fertility of Englishwomen is still further diminished, is undesirable."

But a widespread, even a universal, desire for a higher birth-rate among biologically desirable stocks will probably not achieve much unless the present economic incentives to self-imposed infertility are removed; unless, indeed, economic incentives to fertility are put in their place.

The investigations of the Positive Eugenics Committee should go far to provide the knowledge on which policies for reversing the present tendency of the birth-rate may be based. It is essential that, when the decline in our numbers actually sets in, this *Society* should be ready with the practical proposals

* The Norman Lockyer Lecture, 1934. Published by the British Science Guild, 6 John Street, Adelphi, W.C.2. Price 1s.

for increasing fertility that will then certainly be called for.



The House of Bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church, at a meeting in Atlantic City, New Jersey, has passed (by 44 votes to 38) a resolution endorsing "the efforts now being made to secure for licensed physicians, hospitals and medical clinics, freedom to convey such information as is in accord with the highest principle of eugenics, and a more wholesome family life wherein parenthood may be undertaken with due respect for the health of the mother and the welfare of the children."

Admittedly the majority was narrow, but the surprising thing is that it should have existed at all. The Episcopal Church is noted as a stronghold of Conservatism in America. It has been regarded as implacably opposed to all efforts to force birth-control legislation through Congress, and its present endorsement of this policy, particularly if the resolution should pass the House of Deputies, which consists of clergy and laymen, will give a great impetus to the campaign being led by Margaret Sanger for the removal of the Federal ban on birth-control.

In a recent correspondence in the *New Generation*,* Dr. W. J. Robinson, a well-known American advocate of contraception, claimed that the birth-control battle in the United States had been won.

"By which I mean," he said, "that books and pamphlets dealing with prevention can be mailed or sent by express without any interference, that physicians can give preventive information just as freely as they can prescribe cough medicines, that preventive remedies and appliances can be obtained without any difficulty, that Birth Control clinics are not in any way interfered with—in short, that *no woman desirous of obtaining preventive information need go without it*. That many women do not use preventives because they are ignorant of their existence, or do not know how to obtain them, does not militate against my statement. Millions of women are ignorant of the simplest measures of ordinary hygiene. That does not say that the teaching of ordinary hygiene is forbidden."

Dr. Robinson is, we fear, over-optimistic.

According to the Federal laws it is illegal to send through the mails any "book, pamphlet, picture, paper, letter, writing, printing or other publication" giving information on birth-control—all such literature being classified in the Criminal Code with "obscene, lewd, lascivious, and filthy matter." But the postal authorities have now decided that certain works recommending a method of birth-control sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church—namely, "safe period" intercourse—are mailable; which in effect means that, whereas formerly it was illegal to send any birth-control literature through the mails, it is now legal as long as the literature is careful to recommend a method which, in the opinion of many authorities on contraception, combines the maximum of inefficiency with the minimum of decency. That is what is known as compromise.

The situation with regard to the sale of contraceptives is equally farcical. It must be realized that the practice of birth-control is not illegal in the United States; the law, with superb disregard of logic, is concerned only with preventing people from obtaining the knowledge and appliances for doing what they have a perfect right to do. One State—namely Connecticut—offers an exception to this general statement. Everywhere else birth-control may be practised but the manufacture, advertisement or sale of contraceptives is forbidden; in Connecticut, on the other hand, contraceptives may be manufactured, advertised or sold, but people must on no account use them!

Until the dictatorship of the twenty million Catholics in the United States over the lives and opinions of over one hundred millions of their fellow citizens is "liquidated," and until new laws are passed to exempt physicians, hospitals, clinics and medical schools from the legislation that now restricts them in the matter of granting birth-control information, it is surely only in a highly esoteric sense that the fight for birth-control can be said to be "won."



It was with very deep regret that we received the news, on December 6th, of the

* November 1934, p. 131.

death of Lord Riddell, one of the most influential supporters of the cause for which this *Society* stands.

Some indication of the wide scope of Lord Riddell's interests may be found in his collected essays, published under the titles *Some Things That Matter* and *More Things That Matter*, and in his writings on medico-legal problems and eugenics; and it is significant of the esteem in which he was held by the medical profession that he was an honorary member of the British Medical Association, an honorary Fellow of the British College of Obstetricians and Gynæcologists, and a past-president of the Medico-Legal Society.

In this REVIEW it is fitting that we should express our profound gratitude for the generosity with which he subsidized the publication of pamphlets that have been widely used in our propaganda: of the buff pamphlet on eugenic sterilization, the blue pamphlet (*Better Unborn*) which was made at his suggestion, and most recently the valuable edition of the Brock Report minus appendices published by the Joint Committee on Voluntary Sterilization.



No tribute to Lord Buckmaster, who died on the same day, would be complete that did not recall the passionate sincerity and eloquence with which he espoused the cause of birth-control. It is no exaggeration to say that the mere fact of his advocacy, apart entirely from the reasons by which he supported it, was sufficient to win for birth-control the adherence of a great public which had learned to respect the combined idealism and reasoned judgment that were his most prominent characteristics. To his motion in the House of Lords, on April 28th, 1926, for withdrawing "all instructions given to, or conditions imposed on, welfare committees for the purpose of causing such committees to withhold from married women in their district information when sought by such women as to the best means of limiting their families," may be attributed, more than to any other single factor, the present comparatively enlightened attitude of the Ministry of Health in this matter. His concluding words on that

occasion form one of the most moving appeals for a wider knowledge of birth-control that have ever been made.

"I would appeal," he said, "on behalf of the men who struggle in the grip of forces they can neither stem nor understand, upon whom the pressure of our civilization falls with such a burden that beneath its weight there is blotted out all the beauty, and the simpler happiness of life, that should be the heritage of us all; on behalf of the women—the women upon whose bare backs falls the untempered lash of the primeval curse declaring that 'in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children,' the women with the pride and glory of their life broken and disrowned, and the flower of motherhood turned into nothing but decaying weeds; and on behalf of the children—the children who are thrust into this world unwanted, unwelcomed, uncherished, unsustained, the children who do not bring trailing behind them clouds of glory but the taint of inherited disease, and over whose heads there may hover for ever the haunting horror of inherited madness: on behalf of them all I would appeal and as men who believe in the great future of our race, I beg of you, I earnestly entreat you, to support the Motion that I seek to move."



The statement that sterilization in the United States has been a failure receives no support from reports that reach us on the number of sterilizations carried out in that country. It may be recalled that up to January 1st, 1930, such operations had been performed on 10,877 persons in State institutions. By January 1933 this number had increased to 16,066—6,999 on males and 9,067 on females. On January 1st, 1934, the total was 17,898, representing 1,892 operations in the year, and an increase of over 60 per cent. in four years. The number is certainly not large, but if it indicates failure it is a sort that most of us could bear with equanimity.



Two books on sterilization which have appeared in the past quarter deserve a prominent place on the bookshelves of every Fellow and Member of the *Eugenics Society*. They are *Voluntary Sterilization*, by Dr. C. P. Blacker,* and the *Handbook for Speakers*,

* Oxford University Press. Price 5s.

published by the Joint Committee on Voluntary Sterilization.*

The former work is at once the most compact, lucid and persuasive exposition of the subject available to the English reader. It carries the history of this aspect of eugenics from the appointment of the Royal Commission for the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded, which conducted its inquiry between 1905 and 1909, till the present date ; and proceeds to a temperate, admirably documented, and ordered statement of the medical, legal, and social problems connected with eugenic sterilization in this country and abroad. Perhaps its greatest strength is in its calculated under-statement of the case for voluntary sterilization, demonstrating the necessity for and value of this measure with all the greater force because it never fails to concede to its opponents all that is reasonable in their arguments. There may be, religious scruples of course apart, a case against voluntary sterilization, but after reading Dr. Blacker's cautiously stated argument, his exposition of the nature of sterilizing operations, of the safeguards for preventing their abuse, and of the categories of persons to whom they would be applied, one cannot help wondering what it is.

It is only necessary to add that *Voluntary Sterilization* is a book for the expert and lay reader alike. Every technical term that is likely to be unfamiliar to the general reader is clearly defined either in the body of the

text or in footnotes, and the author is too experienced a writer ever to involve his exposition in irrelevancies or to let it move at any point faster than the average intelligent person could follow.



The Handbook for Speakers is in effect an abridgment of *Voluntary Sterilization*. It covers the subject under the following heads : history of sterilization ; sterilizing operations ; sterilization and the law ; hereditary diseases and defects ; voluntary *versus* compulsory sterilization ; safeguards ; objections to sterilization ; arguments and statements to avoid ; notes for lecturers. Like *Voluntary Sterilization* it is supplied with a well-made index.

There could be no better exemplification of the pitfalls which beset the path of the incautious exponent of voluntary sterilization than the list of " Arguments and Statements to Avoid " printed at the end of this handbook ; nor, it need hardly be added, could anyone wishing to speak on this difficult and delicate subject find a more useful guide to its intricacies. It sets out both the facts on which our propaganda rests and the principles by which lectures embodying these facts may be constructed. No one wishing to expound in public or private the sterilization policy of this *Society* can afford to be without a copy.*

* Obtainable from the Secretary, 69 Eccleston Square, W.C.1. Price 1s.

* Readers of the REVIEW who are prepared to speak on voluntary sterilization are invited to communicate with the Secretary of the Joint Committee.

